

A Headache by rosswrites

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Summary:

“Mike knew he was in deep shit. He saw how Hoppers’ eyes sprang back and forth, picking out every detail of his daughter’s lifeless body.” OR when Mike tries to be a good boyfriend and El Hopper has to survive the void.

1. Mike Wheeler's Terrible Day

Author's Note:

Timeline: Early November 1985.

All of my fics (and more, shorter and better) writing is on Tumblr @strange-thangs.

“This is a lot harder than I remember,” Dustin said through a nearly shut mouth. For some reason, carrying El’s lifeless body two years ago seemed easier than it did now. He only had to carry her a few hundred more feet until they reached the cabin. Dustin’s yellow sweatshirt was stained with mud from El’s soaking wet sweater. El’s once clean overalls were now brown and dark shades of blue.

“It’s the adrenaline,” Lucas said, his eyes intensely staring at the front door to the Hopper’s cabin. The early November sunlight was dying, the air cold enough that the boys’ breath began to create mists in front of their faces.

It was Mike’s idea to have Will and Max go back to warn Hopper. Something told him that showing up with an unconscious girlfriend unannounced was not the best way to win brownie points with her father.

“Either way Hopper’s gonna kill you,” Lucas scoffed. “I’ll be sure to throw roses on your casket as they lower you down.”

“Shut up. It was an accident, we all saw it. She slipped on a rock and hit her head.” Mike spoke with a tinge of blue in his voice.

El falling was an accident. No question. Could her injury have been avoided? Absolutely.

Not even five minutes after she hit the ground did Mike start to blame himself for not watching her every moment. He saw her standing on one side of the creek one second. He turned to yell at Max, and then the next moment El was lying head first in a stream of water. He was her boyfriend, he had to take care of her. He failed her. She had saved him so many times, but why couldn’t he even

protect her from falling in the woods?

As the three boys made arrival, not ten steps from the porch, Hopper emerged, throwing the door open so forcefully Mike thought it would put a hole in the wall. He ran down the front steps and scooped El up from Dustin's arms. Mike knew he was in deep shit. He saw how Hoppers' eyes sprang back and forth, picking out every detail of his lifeless daughters body. Hopper didn't say a word.

Mike began to have flashbacks to that night at the school. El looked just as broken she did then, her mouth slightly agape, her arms like a rag doll, swaying with each step. This time, though, Mike caught himself noticing, blood wasn't coming from her nose. Rather, he could see a warm shade of red building under her curly hair.

Mike knew the cabin inside and out. He'd been there everyday he could, coming after school to work on homework with El and spending weekends lunches together. The cabin was so familiar to Mike that it almost felt like a second home. He'd spent the night only twice, both times during the snowstorms that made leaving the cabin too dangerous. Hopper had reluctantly let him stay on the sofa. Neither time did Mike sleep, rather he and El stayed up all night, just sitting together, side by side.

Yes—the cabin felt like a second home—but in Mike's mind home was wherever El was. He practically lived in the hospital when she had pneumonia; he never left her side for all 3 days.

So, when Mike, Dustin, and Lucas entered the cabin, Mike went straight for the medicine cabinet that hung in the small kitchen.

He could find that cabinet with his eyes closed. Due to the amount of times he had to get packets of tissues for El's nosebleeds and band-aids for the paper cuts she'd get for all the reading she does, Mike knew where *everything* was. He grabbed a box of band-aids and hydrogen peroxide and turned to she Hopper begin to set El down on the sofa.

Hopper started to pull off El's soaked sweater, revealing the white long-sleeve Hawkins Middle Homecoming shirt Mike had lost a few months ago. Her overalls came off too, the flannel pajamas

underneath a testament for how cold that November was.

After Mike handed Hopper the supplies he sat down next to the sofa and grabbed El's hand. He couldn't let go. She was breathing, Mike was relieved, but she still wasn't fully awake. When Hopper began to dab her head wound with the hydrogen peroxide, El's face clenched and she began to wiggle. Mike squeezed her hand tighter, but, even after she settled down, she still didn't open her eyes.

Mike let go, and stood up, towering over the sofa and Hopper, who was still kneeling over El's head, delicately placing a bandage on the center of her forehead. There was something in Mike that made him angry. He caused this. He'd be reckless. He wasn't there to protect her. He couldn't bear to see her in this condition. So, when he turned away, he noticed the rest of the party standing close together by the door.

"You guys go. I'll catch up." The words came out of Mike's mouth with a forcefulness he wasn't expecting. Mike knew Hopper wasn't one for stressful situations, and having all of the party would only make it worse.

"Mike, are you sure?" Lucas said hesitantly, his eyes still on the small girl lying on the sofa.

"Yes, just go!" Mike yelled. The cracking in his voice caused Hopper to stop tending to El's wound. Mike did his best to act like he wasn't overprotective of El. He hated babying her. Ever since she came back, he noticed how independent she was, how she studied every night, how she stopped holding his hand in crowded places, how she no longer looked at him for permission. But at this moment, all of her independence in limbo, Mike was in control.

Dustin opened his mouth, ready to respond with a long winded explanation of why the whole party needed to be there, but Max grabbed his arm, and began to pull him out the door. Mike was left alone with Hopper and El. Under any other circumstances this would bring Mike joy. Today, however, he only felt dread and anger.

"Hey kid, I know you want to be here for her but I've got it under control," Hopper spoke softly. He stood up and began walking over to

Mike, who was watching his friends leave. “She just needs some sleep. You head home and I’ll be sure to let you know when she’s up.”

“If you think I’m leaving her side,” Mike straightened his back, stretching out his full figure. The last time Mike and Hopper fought Mike was three inches shorter. Mike didn’t shy away from using his height to his advantage. “I’m staying.”

“I’m not asking,” Hopper commanded. “I’m telling you to go home!”

“She’s MY GIRLFRIEND I’M NOT LEAVING HER AGAIN—”

Mike was cut off by an explosion—lightbulbs burst, windows shattered, and papers showered down on the small living area. He and Hopper turned to look at El, her nose gushing blood.

Silence filled the cabin as Mike knelt down to wipe the blood from under her nose. Just as he went to turn away, El let out a scream that caused memories of a classroom and demogorgon to flood back into his mind. Yet this time, El’s eyes remained shut and blood oozed from her ears.

Mike looked on in terror as she began choking, gasping for breath, something trying to escape from behind her closed eyes.

Something was wrong. Something was seriously wrong.

2. El Hopper's Nightmare

Summary for the Chapter:

El's trapped. But where? She has to face her fears and fight to survive in her own mind.

Notes for the Chapter:

Timeline: Concurrent to Chapter 1. El's POV
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“Dad...Mike?”

El felt a stinging on her forehead, just below her hair line. She scrunched her face but it only made her head throb more. She opened her eyes and saw Hopper standing over her, a wet towel in his hands.

El sat up and kept her eyes on her father. She noticed she had lost the overalls and sweater she put on that morning. She sat barefoot in her pjs and one of Mike's 'borrowed' shirts. *How did I get here?*

El blinked.

When she opened her eyes again she began picking out things that she hadn't seen before. She was sitting on the sofa, the one that sat in the middle of the cabin. But there were no walls. There was just Hopper, Mike, and the sofa. She was surrounded by nothingness.

Hopper came over to the sofa and knelt down. He slowly placed a bandage on the now empty spot where El had been lying just moments before. El reached up and touched her forehead. A bandage seemed to have appeared out of thin air.

“The Mind Palace,” El softly whispered.

I'm watching myself.

This was new, and something about it terrified her. She was a spectator to her own life. She closed her eyes and tried to pull herself

out of her Palace, but nothing happened. She just opened her eyes and was still there. She was stuck.

El placed her feet down in front of the sofa, her toes resting in the shallow lukewarm water that covered the Palace.

She stood up and moved out of the way of Hopper and Mike, afraid that, if she came into contact with them, they'd disappear. She felt no blood under her nose, which was strange, as any trip into her Mind Palace left her with a bloody upper lip and little energy. *Something was wrong.*

Sensory deprivation, Mike had called it one day when he and her were discussing her powers. Much to Mike's displeasure El didn't want to lose her powers and felt that even though she wanted a normal life, she wasn't a normal person, and her powers made her who she was. They were a part of her, but they did not *define* her.

If I'm still on the sofa, then I'm kind of sleeping. El had visited Her Palace in her sleep only once, in Chicago, but Hopper had mentioned it might happen again sooner or later. *There's a reason I'm here. But why?*

"You guys go. I'll catch up."

El looked away from Hopper, who was still tending the invisible girl on the sofa, and focused on Mike, who was standing off to the side, facing a black abyss.

The party, El remembered. *We were out walking and everyone was there. There was a rock and...and...* El couldn't recall what happened next. It was blank. There were no images, sounds, feelings she could latch on to to bring her memory back. *Something happened and I don't remember.*

"Yes, just go!"

The forcefulness in Mike's words caused El to take a step back, splashing the shallow water. Her pjs were now wet. She had never seen Mike so... so... *frustrated*. He rarely took no for an answer. He was too *stubborn*, a word Hopper loved to throw around and call El.

El watched as the expression on Mike's face went from anger to anguish. *Does his anger have something to do with me and the Hopper and the bandage on my head?*

El ran to him, splashing the water at her feet, but she stopped, reminding herself that, if she touched him, he'd disappear, vanish into smoke. She began to feel tears well in her eyes. All she wanted to do was comfort him, but all she could do was be spectator to her own life.

Life had a way of being cruel to El. It would take and take and take and never give back. But it made her stronger. All that pain and suffering and it only made her kind. Standing there, powerless, El was broken. Her one true superpower, kindness, was stifled by the laws of science that were far beyond her comprehension. Sure, it was all in her mind. Mental projections of the physical self. Mike and Hopper weren't actually there. *But that didn't make them any less real.*

"Hey kid, I know you want to be here for her but I've got it under control."

El slowly turned to watch Hopper stand up, still towering over the empty sofa.

"Dad, let him stay, please." El walked up behind Hopper. She caught herself before she realized *they can't hear me. They're not actually here.*

"She just needs some sleep. You head home and I'll be sure to let you know when she's up." Most of the time, El thought, Hopper was right. He protected her, saved her, fed her, loved her. She trusted him to make the right decisions. But here and now, El knew Hopper wasn't right. Mike needed to stay. He wouldn't make it on his own, not without knowing she was safe. He needed to trust Mike.

Mike turned to face Hopper, his stature changing, his entire appearance shifting to a rigid statue, almost knight-like.

"If you think I'm leaving her side," Mike commanded, his eyes staring down Hopper.

El stepped in between the boy and the man. She hated seeing her boyfriend and her father fight, because nearly every time it was about her. About going out, about being safe, about being *normal*.

“Mike, pick your battles, please,” El whispered.

“I’m staying.” Mike’s voice broke.

El’s heart shattered. The boy she loved more than life was staring right through her, unaware his bravery wasn’t going unnoticed. The true testament of a hero is what they do when no one is watching. How they stand, how they fight, how they sacrifice with no regard for fame or validation. *Mike, you care too much*, El thought.

“I’m not asking,” Hopper ordered. “I’m telling you to go home!”

El spun around and threw her arms out, afraid the two people she loved more than anything in her life would fight to the death.

“Dad! DAD! STOP!” El screamed as tears ran down her face.

“She’s MY GIRLFRIEND I’M NOT LEAVING HER AGAIN—”

El had never felt terrified and frustrated to the point of explosion before. Yet something in her broke free. Her anger at Mike for being so stubborn, her horror at her own father for being so...so...*stupid*. She hated fighting. She hated seeing them fight. It was too much. Everything was too much.

“STOP IT!” El wailed.

Blood rushed throughout her body. Her heart pounded, the bandage on her forehead seemed like it was tearing at the seams. Blood gushed out from her nose. Panic raced into her mind. *This is too much blood. No. Something’s not right.*

The sound of Mike’s flustered breath brought El to her senses. Mike and Hopper had terrified looks on their faces, like something terrible had just happened around them. Hopper stood off to the side, surveying the black nothingness, staring at what El could only assume to be the walls of the cabin.

El walked up behind Mike as he knelt down to look after the empty space on the sofa. There was something about his caring nature, his constant stress that came as a result of trying to keep her and everyone he cared about safe. El loved him, but she hated how he suffered for others. He put others first. Sometimes she hated how he was always the hero.

By the time El noticed that Mike had stood up and turned around it was too late for her to get out of the way.

Mike's projection walked right through her and vanished into smoke.
No NO NO!

Hopper and the sofa fade away.

The silence of the void was replaced by shattering cries and sobs.

El had to leave. She had to get out.

Focusing all of her energy on leaving, on escaping, on seeing Mike and Hopper, El put her hands to her head and screamed.

“LET ME OUT!”

And it let her out.

El no longer feels the lukewarm water between her toes, the somewhat comforting sensation replaced by cold, almost icy tingles on her nose. Wind blows her hair and sends shivers down her spine.

What El expects to see is far different than what she sees in front of her.

The subtle trickle of water washing over rocks and the distant snap of twigs tells El that she's at the creek. Mike is across the water, his eyes longingly staring at her.

“Come on I'll catch you,” Mike calls over to her. It's just a small hop across the water. “You'll be fine.”

Time is passing slowly. El's had flashbacks before, or at least that's what Hopper calls them. *This isn't like the other ones. It feel's like what*

Joyce says Will's are like. Like he's really there, like he's awake.

Max is standing down stream holding a large rock in her hands. El notices Lucas and Dustin standing near the water's edge.

"Hey Max," Mike shouts, his eyes now on the girl with the red hair. "It's not nice to throw rocks. It disturbs the ecosystem."

Distracted by Mike's sudden outburst, El doesn't notice the piece of moss under her foot, and, as she steps forward, she loses her balance and falls face first into the creek.

El's head hits a rock at the bottom of the creek. It's only deep enough to cover her face and nothing more. She's paralyzed, unable to lift her head up for air. She gasps for breath but she only draws in more of the murky, muddy water.

El begins seeing the tank at the lab, the water in the void, the cold rain one November night.

Suddenly someone grabs her shoulder and pulls her out of the water. Her lungs feel as if they're filled with sandbags. She tries to cough the dirty liquid out but it remains, like it's cemented down her throat.

"She's choking!" El hears Mike scream, shouting as he pulls her to the dry forest floor.

Mike kneels down next to her, unbuttons her overalls, and, placing two hands over her chest, begins CPR.

"One, two, three..."

...four, five, six..."

Hopper stood with his hand over his mouth, staring at his daughters body, as she lay on the floor, the only movement from her eyes under her shut eyelids, as if she was having some terrible dream.

"...twenty-nine, thirty." Tears were streaming down Mike's face. His voice cracked with each number. *Not again, I can't do this again.*

Mike pulled his hands away from her chest and pinched her nose. He dove head first at her mouth, and took two huge breaths, keeping his mouth sealed against hers.

“Come on, El, not again, not now, please...” Mike began compressions again, his breathing seemingly getting heavier with the rising numbers.

“One, two, three...”

“...twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty.”

Max had looked on in terror, her hands shaking as she held El's. Lucas stood to the side, clinging on to Dustin, who had taken his hat off, gripping it tight enough that it began to lose its shape. Will had taken to brushing El's curls out of the way, tending to her bloody forehead.

“Come on El, you can do it,” Mike wailed, as he pinched her nose again, pressing his mouth against hers and breathing twice.

Just as he noticed his tears falling on her cheeks, brown and clear liquid surfaced, her body lurching forward with each cough.

“El, keep coughing, El...El look at me, just keep breathing...” Mike ran his hands through her curls, wiping the blood away from her forehead before it reached her eyebrows. He rested her head down, her breathing slowing, but she wasn't moving.

“Why isn't she awake,” Max let out, subdued sobs clinging after each word. She held El's hand tighter than before. “Mike, why isn't she waking up!”

Before Mike could respond Will stood up, placing a hand on Max's shoulder.

“She's unconscious. She'll come to soon.” Will spoke with authority, some kind of attempt to restore order after the chaos.

“Will, Max, you go back tell Hopper what happened,” Mike gently stroked El's forehead, his tears still falling on her cheeks. “We'll take

her.”

Both Will and Max eyed Mike with confusion and slight distrust.

“GO!” Mike yelled. El was his girlfriend. She was his responsibility.

Mike pulled away after El’s first cough, fear still lingered on his face, but hope began to burn in his heart.

After what seemed like the worst coughing fit Mike and Hopper had ever seen, El sat up and leaned against the sofa, reaching out for Mike to steady herself.

“El, are you okay?” Mike spoke, breaking the silence that lingered over the cabin. He clenched her hand tight, rubbing his thumb over her cold knuckles.

El was back in the cabin. Mike and Hopper were kneeling besides her. She grabbed Hopper’s hand with her free hand, and, in that moment, holding on to the two people she loved more than anything in the world, she never felt more at home.

“El, what happened?” Hopper got down from his kneeling position and sat down on the floor, still holding El’s hand a bit too tight. “You scared the shit outta us.”

“Dad...” El felt sobs begin to form in her throat. Hopper noticed her eyes become watery.

“El, Ellie, you don’t have to tell us.” Hopper glanced over at Mike, who nodded in agreement.

Yet through muffled sobs and broken, fragmented sentences, El told Mike and Hopper everything. She told them about being trapped in the void, about the flashback, about everything.

And the entire time neither Mike nor Hopper interrupted her, not when she reverted to single words, not when she started to cry, and not when she sat in silence after she finished.

“I’m sorry,” El finally whispered, ending the quiet that somehow felt

comforting.

“Hey, none of this is your fault,” Hopper said, leaning in to kiss the crown of her head. He stood up and walked to his bed, grabbing a blanket and returning to place it over her.

“I messed up,” Mike jumped in, still seated on the floor next to El. “I wasn’t there for you. I’m the one that should be sorry.”

“But you were there after. You saved me. Twice.” El pulled her other hand out from under the blanket and rested it on the one Mike was already holding. “I don’t deserve you, Mike Wheeler.”

“I don’t deserve *you*, El Hopper.”

After an hour of silence sitting on the floor, El decided to actually move *on* the sofa, a sentiment Mike wholeheartedly supported. Together, Mike and El snuggled under a blanket while Hopper sat at the kitchen table drinking well deserved coffee.

El felt safe nestled in Mikes arms. As long as he held her close and she held him closer, nothing could ever go wrong. Mike was her knight, and though El hated being protected, shielded from everything, there was something about Mike that made her wish to be a queen, like those fascinating women in her books. *No*, El thought. *He’s not my knight. He’s the king to my queen.* They’d stand side by side, fighting each others battles, protecting one another to the death.

“Apologize,” El whispered to Mike, her head still resting on his chest.

“For what?” Mike furrowed his brow and tilted his head.

“For being a stubborn *ass*,” El retorted.

“I was not—” Mike was cut off by a forceful poke to his side. He glared at El and spoke up. “I’m sorry for being stubborn, sir. I should’ve trusted you.”

“Mike.” *Hopper never referred to the party by their names.* “I’m sorry for doubting *you*.” Mike only raised a slight smile. “You’re braver than I thought.”

Silence fell over the cabin. It was peaceful.

“Hey kid, when’d you learn CPR?” Hopper spoke up, resting his coffee mug on the table. Something about the way he asked led El to believe that Hopper was impressed, like he was surprised by Mike’s ability to save her, like Hopper had experience with CPR before.

“We all did, after...after Will’s...experiences...and all.” El felt Mike tense up, his hands more intensely caressing her’s under the blanket. Mike hated talking about their year apart, especially when it came to talking about Will. El made the quick and conscious decision to change the subject, and *fast*.

“This is when it would’ve been nice to have a dog to keep me company,” El said, digging her head deeper into Mike’s chest. He responded like he always did: smiling and placing a kiss on her curls.

“There is nothing you can do to convince me to get you a dog,” Hopper said laughingly.

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” Mike responded, cuddling El even more than before. “Telekinesis can be pretty convincing.”

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading! I'd love to hear your thoughts and opinions! I take requests on my tumblr or in the comments below!